B2B GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGY

The Growth Gap: Why Successful Businesses Outgrow Their Go-to-Market Strategy *in the AI Era*

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Learn why successful businesses outgrow their go-to-market strategy, how AI widens the growth gap, and the signs your ICP, messaging, and GTM need an update.

Successful businesses rarely stall because demand disappears. More often, they stall because the strategy that helped them grow no longer fits the business they have become. As AI accelerates content creation, outreach and analysis, it is exposing weaknesses that already existed in many organisations: unclear customer focus, outdated positioning, inconsistent messaging and commercial teams working harder than they should. According to research cited by Pepper Insight in 2025, organisations with a structured go-to-market framework generate up to three times higher revenue growth than those operating through ad hoc processes. The challenge is that many businesses continue operating with a GTM strategy built for a very different stage of growth.

The Growth Paradox

The paradox is simple. The more successful a business becomes, the more likely its original GTM playbook starts to strain under the weight of that success. Early on, growth can be driven by a narrow ICP, a sharp message, and a few high-performing channels. But as the business expands into new segments, geographies, or use cases, the same playbook can become too broad, too generic, or too dependent on heroics.

This matters because only 5% of B2B buyers are actively in-market at any given time. The remaining 95% are forming future buying preferences long before they engage with suppliers. If the market's perception of your business no longer reflects the reality of what you've become, that gap can limit future growth.

AI makes this paradox sharper. It can help teams produce more content, personalise outreach, and automate parts of the sales process, but it cannot replace the strategic decisions that define who the business should target or why buyers should care. In many companies, AI is increasing output faster than it is improving focus, which means the GTM gap can widen even as activity levels rise.

In practice, growth creates complexity. More stakeholders enter the buying process, more products or packages need to be explained, and more teams touch the customer journey. If the

GTM strategy does not evolve with that complexity, the company can still look busy while becoming less efficient.

Why Businesses Hit a Ceiling

Being ahead of the market and being ahead of customer demand are not always the same thing.

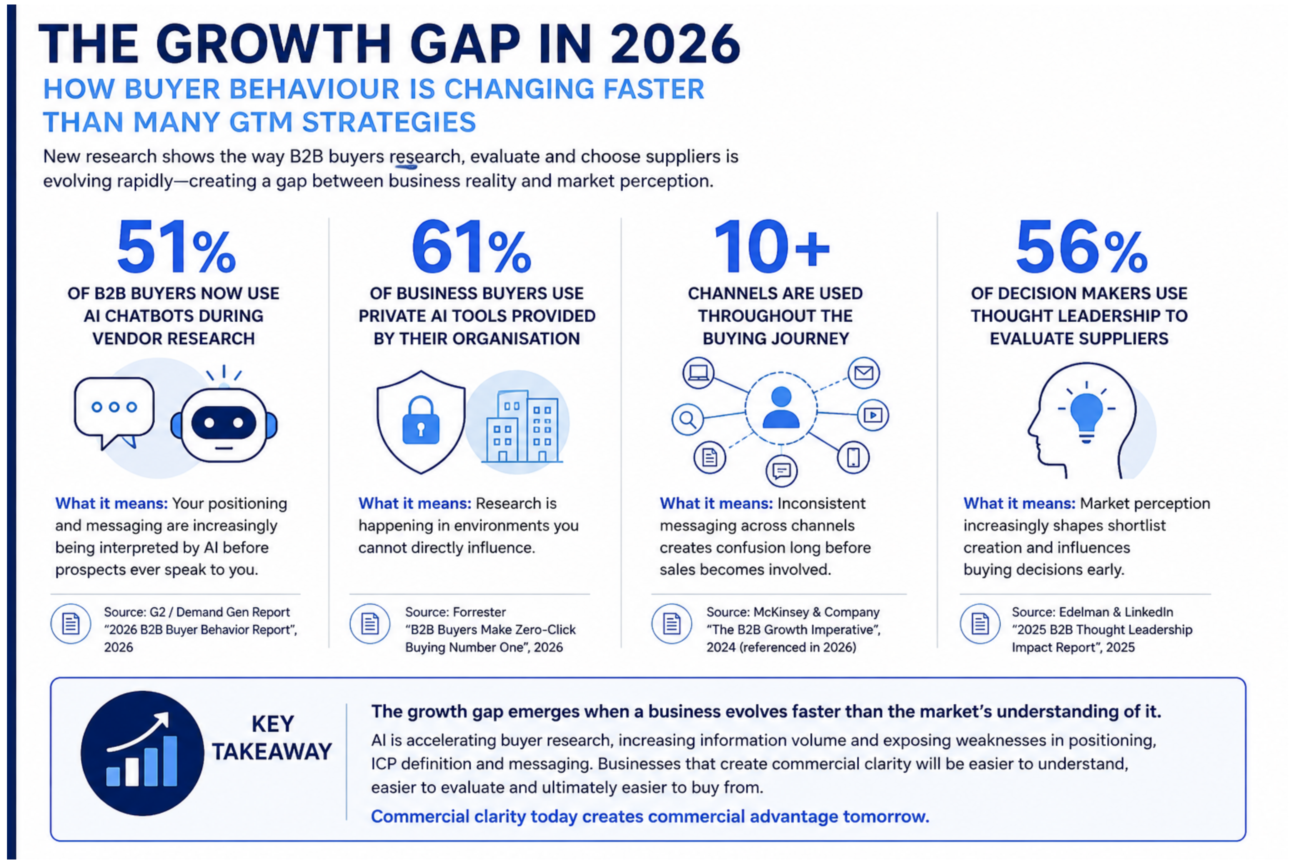
Businesses do not always hit a ceiling because demand has disappeared. More often, the market opportunity and the way the business is trying to capture it have fallen out of alignment. The product may have evolved, new capabilities may have been added and the business may be looking towards its next customer segment, but the commercial story and go-to-market approach are still built around earlier assumptions.

I saw this play out in B2B embedded finance. Consumer adoption helped generate significant excitement around the category, but that did not translate as quickly into the B2B market. Many businesses were building for where they believed the market was heading, rather than for a problem their customers were already trying to solve. They were not necessarily wrong about the direction of travel. The difficulty was that buyers first had to understand and believe in the wider market shift before they could understand the value of the solution itself.

Commercial cards gained traction more easily because the need was already recognised. Businesses understood spend control, expense management, reconciliation and financial visibility. The value was tangible and did not require the buyer to be educated on an entirely new category before appreciating the solution. This is an important distinction. Being ahead of the market and being ahead of customer demand are not always the same thing.

That is why some innovative businesses struggle despite having strong products and a clear vision. The issue is not always capability. It is that market understanding, customer readiness and commercial value have not yet aligned. AI may help accelerate market education and make complex propositions easier to communicate, but it cannot manufacture demand or remove the need for a clear, immediate reason to buy.

The ceiling appears when the old model still produces activity, but not enough conversion, retention, or expansion to justify the effort. In other words, the company is still moving, but it is no longer compounding.



Sources: Gartner · LinkedIn B2B Institute · McKinsey & Company · Edelman

Signs Your GTM Hasn't Evolved

01 Unclear ICP

A bigger market is not always a better market.

An unclear ICP is one of the earliest warning signs. Sometimes businesses start with the wrong assumptions about who they are built for and where they can create the greatest value. Similarly, sometimes they have just outgrown their value proposition in the market necessitating a change in targeting and focus but instead of leading with evidence driven targeting they are often adding segments without a clear answer on which ones create the best long-term value. That usually means the company is selling to whoever is available rather than whoever is most profitable.

In the early stages, it can be tempting to cast a wide net. The logic is understandable. More audiences should mean more opportunity. In reality, broad targeting often creates confusion. Positioning becomes diluted, messaging changes depending on who the business is speaking to and commercial teams struggle to establish a clear market identity.

I've seen this first hand. One business I worked with attempted to appeal to both consumers and businesses, believing it would maximise market opportunity. Instead, it created confusion. The proposition shifted depending on the audience, the messaging lacked consistency and the business struggled to establish a position it could credibly own.

The breakthrough came when the leadership team stepped back and challenged some fundamental assumptions. Through value proposition canvassing and customer analysis, they examined where the solution delivered the greatest value, which customer problems were most acute and where the business had a genuine right to win. What emerged was a very different picture. Rather than serving a broad consumer and B2B audience, the business was uniquely positioned to solve a specific problem within an emerging market segment. Once the organisation aligned around that audience, everything became easier. The positioning sharpened, messaging became clearer and the business finally had a market it could credibly own.

If sales, marketing, product, and customer success cannot commercially agree on who the business is best for, the company will waste spend, dilute messaging, and chase the wrong accounts. An ICP also needs to be evidence-based, not nostalgic; it should reflect which customers buy, adopt, renew, and expand, not just which ones looked attractive at the start.

AI can either help or hurt here. Used well, it can sharpen segmentation and spot patterns in conversion and retention data; used poorly, it can make every segment look equally viable because content and outreach can be generated at scale.

> *Everyone is not your customer.*
>
> **SETH GODIN**
> Author, Entrepreneur and Marketing Thought Leader

02 Outdated Positioning

Positioning becomes outdated when the market changes faster than the story a business tells about itself. What once felt differentiated can quickly become expected, particularly in crowded B2B markets where competitors are making similar claims and using similar language.

I've seen businesses become victims of their own success. Over time they add capabilities, enter new markets and solve increasingly complex customer problems. Internally, the business has evolved significantly. Externally, the market often continues to view it through the lens of what it was originally known for. That gap between business reality and market perception is where positioning starts to become a constraint on growth.

AI is accelerating this challenge. The ability to generate content at scale means more businesses are saying similar things, making genuine differentiation harder to achieve. When positioning no longer reflects the value a business creates today, prospects hear generic promises rather than a compelling reason to choose one provider over another.

> *Different is better than better.*
>
> CHRISTOPHER LOCHHEAD
> Co-author, *Play Bigger* and Category Design Pioneer

03 Inconsistent Messaging

Individually, each message can make sense but collectively, they create confusion.

Inconsistent messaging is usually a symptom of weak alignment upstream. Marketing may describe the value proposition one way, sales may simplify it in the field, and customer success may emphasise yet another set of outcomes. To buyers, that inconsistency feels like confusion, and confusion lowers trust.

This problem tends to grow as the company adds products, verticals, or regions. Without a clear message hierarchy and governance, every team starts improvising. The result is a brand that sounds active but not coherent.

One of the quickest ways to spot a messaging problem is to compare what a business says about itself across different channels and in today's b2b environment, buyers don't encounter a business through a single touchpoint. McKinsey research found that B2B buyers now use an average of 10 or more channels throughout the buying journey. When those channels communicate different stories, confusion becomes inevitable.

Recently, I came across an organisation preparing to make its first marketing hire. The job description positioned the business one way, the LinkedIn company page told a different story and the website presented something else entirely. Individually, each message made sense. Collectively, they created confusion. If a prospective employee, customer or investor can't quickly understand who you are and what makes you different, the problem isn't the wording. It's that the business hasn't aligned around a single commercial narrative.

AI can help businesses create content faster, but it cannot create alignment. In many organisations, it simply accelerates existing inconsistencies. Without a shared understanding of the customer, value proposition and commercial narrative, different teams naturally create different versions of the story. The result is a business that sounds active in the market but struggles to sound coherent.

04 Sales Doing Too Much Heavy Lifting

When sales teams have to explain the core value proposition from scratch in every conversation, the go-to-market system is underperforming. Sales should refine the story, not create it.

I've seen sales teams become the translation layer for the business. They're not simply selling. They're explaining, reframing and correcting market perceptions that should have been addressed much earlier in the buyer journey. The business may continue to grow, but often because sales is compensating for weaknesses elsewhere in the commercial engine.

This matters more than ever. Gartner estimates that B2B buyers now complete around 70% of their purchasing journey before engaging with a supplier. By the time a prospect reaches sales, they have already formed opinions about the problem, the market and potential solutions. If sales needs to spend significant time explaining what the business does and why it matters, the foundations are likely weaker than they should be.

AI may reduce some manual effort, but it does not remove the need for a strong commercial story. It can help with research, sequencing, and admin, yet the value proposition still needs to be clear enough that a buyer can understand it without a long explanation. This is expensive in more ways than one. It lengthens sales cycles, increases dependency on star performers, and makes growth harder to scale consistently.

05 Marketing Activity Without Commercial Impact

Busy marketing is not the same as effective marketing. If campaigns generate clicks, impressions, or engagement but do not improve pipeline quality, conversion rates, retention, or expansion, then activity has detached from commercial outcomes. This often happens when teams optimise for channel metrics instead of revenue metrics.

A healthy GTM model connects marketing activity to commercial movement. That means knowing which segments convert, which messages land, which plays accelerate deals, and which programmes create downstream value. If those links are missing, marketing may be visible, but it is not yet strategic.

AI can intensify this trap because it makes it easier to publish more, test more, and automate more without proving what moves revenue. A healthy GTM model connects marketing activity to commercial movement. That means knowing which segments convert, which messages land, which plays accelerate deals, and which programmes create downstream value. If those links are missing, marketing may be visible, but it is not yet strategic.

How to Identify the Gap

Start by auditing the business from customer to revenue, not from channel to channel. Ask four practical questions: who converts best, who renews best, what message actually differentiates, and where does the buyer journey break. If the answers vary too much by team or region, your GTM system is likely out of sync with the market.

Next, compare leading indicators with commercial outcomes. If engagement is rising but conversion is flat, or pipeline is growing while retention weakens, the issue is probably not just execution. It may be that the company is attracting the wrong accounts, overpromising the wrong value, or using a sales motion that no longer fits the segment.

Finally, look for friction between teams. Misalignment in goals, ownership, and messaging is a signal that the GTM operating model has not kept pace with growth. When the strategy is healthy, teams can explain the same customer, the same promise, and the same path to value in consistent language.

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> *The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits them and sells itself.*
>
> **PETER DRUCKER**
>
> Management Consultant, Author and Founder of Modern Management Thinking

What to Do Next

The fix is not more noise. It is a sharper strategy built on better evidence. Revisit your ICP, rewrite your positioning for the current market stage, align messaging across functions, and connect every major GTM activity to a commercial outcome.

The businesses that continue to grow are not necessarily the ones doing more. They are the ones willing to challenge the assumptions that got them here. They revisit who they serve, how they create value and whether the market still understands what they have become. In an AI-shaped market, where buyers have more information and more choice than ever before, commercial clarity becomes a competitive advantage. The question is not whether your business has evolved. The question is whether your go-to-market strategy has evolved with it.

If any of the challenges discussed in this article feel familiar, it may be time to take a fresh look at your positioning, customer focus and go-to-market strategy. Sometimes a few small changes can unlock significant commercial momentum.

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